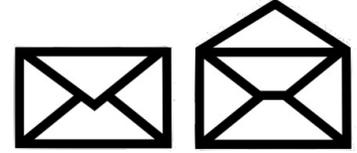


## **“An Open Letter”:**

### **Contentious Conversations, Hard Talks, Needed Confrontation, Calling-Out Leadership**

In an attempt to lay down some of the groundwork necessary to understand “WHY” people publish “An Open Letter,” we have sought to establish some basic points . . . . .

#1) Part of a ministry or local church’s obligation in dealing with disagreements, criticism, or contentious dissent is to provide a sense of fairness and equity, and hopefully, to actually deliver on that obligation. The loss of that sense of fairness and equity is what generates “An Open Letter.”



#2) There is an interesting commonality between sending anonymous letters and sending “An Open Letter.” Both types of communication recognize a broken system is in place that lacks the necessary personal and spiritual maturity to engage in contentious disagreement, dissent, criticism, or confrontation.

#3) In addressing genuine issues of church discipline, there are steps you can take to avoid bringing the congregation into the dispute. What are some steps which a ministry or church can take so that if it can be resolved, and so that the congregation has no knowledge of it on any level?

Again, with broken systems in place, the lack of personal and spiritual maturity results in leaders, pastors, elders, deacons, and administrators who just cannot contain their emotions and responses. A lack of maturity drives some to bring in others who have no knowledge of the disagreement. They end up going public and/or “privately-public.”  
[1]

That lack of maturity leads to an inability to follow the words, the spirit and the purpose of Matthew 18, and exacerbates an already difficult situation.

#### **One of the results**

**-- Really, No Surprise --**

**-- "An Open Letter" --**



#### **(Part #4)**

**“If you don’t know what you are doing, you won’t be able to duplicate it and/or you won’t be able to fix it when it is broken!”**

That statement is what undergirds all the posts regarding “Rhetoric and Homiletics.” The posts are designed to better understand the process of communication, to understand how preaching works, to grasp “why” what works is working.

If a speaker or preacher does not understand “why” what he is doing is working, he may be a good speaker but he cannot help someone else understand the process.

If a speaker or preacher does not understand “why” what he is listening to is so effective, he will not be able to “reproduce” it (not plagiarize it, but grasp the concept at work).

If a speaker or preacher does not understand “why” something is not working, it is broken, he won’t be able to fix it.

**If you don’t know what you are doing, you won’t be able to duplicate it and/or you won’t be able to fix it when it is broken!**

**Likewise**, if you don’t understand why people send anonymous letters to administrators, supervisors, leaders, pastors, and the like . . . and if you don’t understand why people publish “An Open Letter” you will not take the steps which are actually necessary to fix a broken system which needs repair!

Ministry leaders, administrators, pastors, elders, deacons, presidents of colleges and social agencies can decry “Anonymous Letters” . . .

“Don’t send one to me, I am not reading it!”

– They will too. We are all too curious. –

Decry – but what is the cause?

Can I suggest that behind it are several mixed and perhaps overlapping causes . . . .

- a sense of injustice and unfair treatment.
- anger that people have been mistreated and even worse.
- the realization that “power” is out of proper and appropriate restraint.
- an inability to address the situation through the institutional lines of authority.
- the refusal to even talk – personally, directly, frankly, and critically
- the fabrication and concocting of so-called biblical violations
- a denial of “the church’s” rightful role in decision-making

. . . . but these are all bound together by one common cord – the lack of maturity to listen to legitimate (or illegitimate) “criticism,” disapproval, disagreement, and/or contentious dissent.

Disagreement, contentious dissent is welcomed **as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone’s feelings or sensibilities**. As long as no one is called-out for obvious hypocrisy, self-serving decisions, violation of biblical mandates, or an abuse of authority and position, you can share your “opinions.



### **Membership or Ownership:**

Let me describe the cause yet another way – in terms of “membership and ownership.” There is a meaningful and significant difference between being a member of and being the owner of. Too often, the message can be that you are only a member of this-or-that ministry, not the

owner. Those in leadership are the “owners.” They run the business (you “merely” provide the operating capital).

Recently, a music director *approached me* and asked me questions about the music ministry (always a hot topic these days). We were standing midst the pews after the service. After giving my “opinion” on several areas (and I understand that I am seen and deemed a musical amateur), he said to me – “Well, why don’t you come and teach the choir how to . . . .” That turned few heads among those who were hanging around in the pews. In fact, one person came to me moments later and asked me – “Did he say to you that you ought to come and teach the choir how to . . . .”

You see, I was only a member, not one of the owners. I understood the comment – I am not allowed to talk about your “pitching” since I am the “short-stop.” I veered out my designated lane.

When you begin to communicate that vantage in a ministry and/or local church setting, you may keep people in their lanes, but you never develop that ownership spirit, and/or you never get the critical help that is needed for all of us to succeed as co-laborers together.

When God’s people come to the realization that their church is actually not their church, that they are only members of the church – please stay in your appropriate lane -- donations accepted -- this is our party -- the dynamics of ministry begins to change.

Politically, I am not a member of the “Republican or Democratic Party.” I am registered as an “Independent.” Nevertheless, if you or I was a “member” of one of those two parties, I can probably assure you that neither of us would not be one of the “owners.”

They are “owners” who have the power and position to define what our party is all about – and them is not us. We just provide a vote for the owners to be there, and/or a financial donations which support the actual “owners.”

"Members" who come to realize that they are not seen as one co-owners, and that they should not think themselves as such, begin to understand more and more that their input does not matter -- only the input of the real owners is important.

“The church,” by design, is about ownership, all having a say in “their church.” That all have, and should feel that they have, a stake in the operation and success of the church. They believe that speaking to the “pitcher,” “catcher,” “outfielder,” or “short stop” all contributes to the success of the body as a whole.

They believe and should feel that their . . . .

- vantages
- viewpoints
- amateur or professional input
- legitimate or illegitimate “criticism”
- informed or ill-informed opinions
- position, talents, role, participation
- thoughts
- attendance

. . . . matter!

**If you don’t understand  
why it happens,  
you won’t be able to  
fix it when it is broken!**

**Really Matter** – That it is not just my vote or my “check made out to the party” that matters.

**Really Matter** – That my thinking is welcomed, even when I ardently disagree.

**Really Matter** – That my input is sincerely desired and encouraged!

**Really Matter** – That my participation in policy decisions is important / essential!

**Really Matter** – That I’ll not be marginalized or worse because what I say wounds or stings!

When one is only a member and feels no ownership, [2] the dynamics within a church begins to change. The church will begin to move more and more away from congregational rule, to elder rule, "owner rule," or a "congregational-elder-owner-rule hybrid. [3]. *The church culture moves from bottom-up to top-down.*

### *There are signs of a top-down culture . . . .*

**told, not convinced:** “The church” is casually told that this-or-that decision has been made in midst of a series of announcements or a message. The result is that there is little “buy-in” by “the church,” and therefore weak participation by “the members” and primarily by the “owners.”

**announced, not voted on:** Program, policy, or personal changes are not presented to “the church” for meaningful discussion, consideration, or approval; they are announced.

**limited opportunity, not genuine interest:** If “the church” is presented with an opportunity for consideration, it is orchestrated to allow little time for discussion and/or minimal participation. Truthfully, there is little genuine “owner” interest in what “the members” think about this-or-that, and that realization has been baked into the church culture – “Just raise your hand and vote ‘yes’.”

**managed, not open:** If there is any dissent, it is managed. You are allowed to speak to the leaders, pastors, deacons, elders, administrators, board members – only, but not each other. That is deemed “sowing discord” – “**stop - period - end of sentence.**” Only leadership can talk about *it (and you)* among themselves.

When members are no longer considered co-owners, the culture becomes injurious. People are walked over, manhandled, . . . . and worse.

### **One Of The Results? A Sense Of Inequity & Unfairness!**

**They realize that they are just contributing members, not the actual owners. What is said about any openness to different opinions, it is only if you are one of the owners.**

**This is a church of the owners, not the members.**

**There is no avenue available for genuine input, disagreement, different vantages, suggested and needed change, further discussion, dissent, no less ardent dissent.**

**ENTER:  
"Anonymous Letters"  
and/or  
"An Open Letter"**

---

1. The whole purpose of steps 1 and 2 in Matthew is to not have "the church" become aware of the issue or a contentious disagreement. The aim of Matthew 18 is that "the church" would never have been aware of the situation because it was resolved.

When leaders fail to contain what they have claimed or deemed a trespass, and share the conversations and/or correspondence with others, or go public and bring in "the church" before steps 1 or 2 have been taken, they may well seek to cover their tracks by *ludicrous* arguments - - "Well, I just told . . . and" -- "I only said . . . . " -- "I didn't mention . . . . " (and other leaders drink the cool-aid).

To say or do anything which brings in "the church" violates the very words, the spirit, and purpose of the three steps.

To make any comments about the existence of a controversy to individuals outside of the controversy and/or to bring "the church" into the issue, which they may never even have to address, will only deepen the divide.

There is no biblical justification for bringing in others, only one or two others even in step two. Any other reading of Matthew 18 is a twisted way of reading the Scriptures for one's own self-defense!

To make comments about a controversy, no less evaluative statements as to its nature and/or the participants, to others or to "the church" is to run flat into a violation of its very relational design!

It is spiritual immaturity, self-importance, ego and/or pride which causes people to violate the privacy of the dispute. Matthew 18 is designed to demand that parties to a dispute patiently work their way through it until it must be address by any others -- ***first of all with only one or two others!***

The fact that the first step is alone, and that the second step can only involved one or two others, drives home the fact that it is the words, spirit, and purpose of Matthew 18 is privacy not publicity. Step two highlights how inviolate it is to open up the disagreement/controversy to the awareness of others until it must -- step three.

In fact, to go public is to jeopardize the very stated reason for keeping it private -- to keep it one-to-one or one-to-three. The purpose of keeping it contained is so that you can gain your brother.

Public comments violate *the purpose of the commanded steps*, which is *to gain your brother*. When you move it outside of private, no less making public derisive comments about the situation, you violate the Scriptures because you now make it less likely to arrive at resolution.

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.”

2. see – [How Do You Know If You Are A Congregationally Governed Church](#) – The #2 Reason

3. When he/she really does not matter, people are easily discarded, manhandled, seen through the \$\$\$, marginalized, told to stay in his/her lane, quieted, threatened, or mistreated by concocted “biblical arguments,” dismissed, used, indulged, humored, *thrown out*, etc..

"If the counsel came primarily from loving friends, did their love discount the severity of the danger? Friendly counsel often supplies more support and even rationalization than the confrontation and rebuke that may be required. This is why I think it's always good to check in with a few detractors. They care less about your feelings and tend to shell out truth with no sugar (another reason to love your enemies—Luke 6:27).

**Thinking back . . . .** my church leadership would intervene to surround me with loving truth-tellers who shined necessary light onto my oblivious blind spots. We pastors tend to polish our personas to a sparkling sheen and then grow bedazzled with our own reflections." CT - Article On John Ortberg